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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to explain the relationship of Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal to John Dewey's "progressive" educational philosophy; to demonstrate Adler's and Dewey's philosophical similarities; and to discuss the impact and implications of their works on public school curriculum design ideology. Two common denominators are found in both Adler's and Dewey's writing: They agree that schools should promote cultural integration, and schools should search for a means to avoid traditional patterns of elitism based on European models. In disussing this common philosophical framework under which Adler and Dewey base their assumptions, the text mentions the works of Robert Hutchins and Richard Rorty to designate the century old conflict between educators who favor a preponderance of liberal arts courses and those who favor a greater emphasis on science and technology courses in the public school curriculum. (JAM)

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Should Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal Have Been Dedicated to John Dewey?

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Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal[1] bears the dedication, "To Horace Mann, John Dewey, and Robert Hutchins, who would have been our leaders were they alive today." Any student of Philosophy of Education 101 recalls that Adler and his longtime colleague, Robert Hutchins, are primary exemplars of a theory of education commonly known as "perennialism," whereas John Dewey is widely regarded as the foremost American spokesperson for progressivism in education, a theory usually seen as in conflict with perennialism. As a gesture, the dedication suggests the possibility of a reconciliation between educational progressivism and perennialism.

My purpose here is to survey the respects in which Dewey's educational philosophy may be seen as compatible with Adler's aims in the Paideia Proposal, and the respects in which it clearly is not. I wish to conduct this survey in the light of some recent ideas on general education of Richard Rorty which claim to owe much to Dewey, and little to the tradition that Adler represents. While I conclude that the differences between Dewey's and Adler's view on general education represent two quite distinct traditions in American cultural life, nevertheless I find Alder's dedication a hopeful sign for the future, and one that should be commended.

According to Adler "Paideia" is the ancient Greek word for the rearing of children. It bears the suggestion of induction of new members into a cultural community conscious of the distinction of its attainments in the arts and sciences. It is that idea that appears to have guided the selection of the committee that appointed Adler to draft a statement of their recommendations for the reform of secondary education in America. The conclusion

of the committee, as Adler states it, is that, "All...elective choices must be eliminated from secondary schools."[2]

The reasons for such a judgment represent one response to a widely perceived problem in American society: The seemingly accelerating rate of cultural diversity in American life threatens any sense of cultural cohesion in the curricula of American schools, and may, by now, have shattered Horace Mann's 19th century dream of a common school for all America's young.

John Dewey would be likely to agree with the principal thrust of Adler's Paideia Proposal that the first responsibility of schooling in American society is democratic citizenship. Both Dewey and Adler argue that the curriculum of schools should form elements of a common culture in which all citizens can share. Both fear that over-specialization in schooling threatens to fragment the culture beyond the point of social cohesion. For that reason, both would agree that schools in American society should abandon all forms of tracking and indivious grouping of students, together with their specialized curricula. In summary the two principal points on which Alder and Dewey would agree are 1) the need for schools to promote cultural integration; and 2) the search for a means of avoiding traditional patterns of elitism. These patterns came to American schooling from European models, in which schools promoted "high culture" for the sake of differentiating an intellectual elite from the masses.

There is at least one further reason to approve Adler's inclusion of Dewey in the dedication to the Paideia Proposal, with which I end my paper; but it is desirable to withhold consideration of it, until the important quarrels between Adler and Dewey have been considered. As much as anything else, it seems to me that Dewey's and Adler's views on education and culture

represent clashing religious traditions within Western culture. Certain glimmerings of this religious division are to be found in a recent article by Richard Rorty,[3] the neo-pragmatist philosopher, addressing much the same question as that considered in the Paideia Proposal, viz., what should be the curriculum content of a general studies program for the late high school and early college years. Rorty's article makes clear that a Deweyan approach to general studies is not necessarily opposed to a common core of texts and activities, though on different grounds than those in Adler's proposal.

In contrast to Adler, Rorty writes that, "it does not greatly matter what the core curriculum is as long as...each community defines itself by adopting one." "What matters," he continues, "is that there be some things ...all (members of a community) have read and can do, some common subject of conversation."

Rorty makes the effort to draw both Dewey and Adler's long-time colleague, Robert Hutchins, within the net of his approach to general studies. He writes that, "one will not think of the heirs of Erasmus (e.g., Robert Hutchins) or the heirs of T.H. Huxley (e.g., Dewey) as putting forward incompatible alternatives when they emphasize the Great Books on the one hand, or hands-on experience on the other." What each is doing, according to Rorty, is correcting the excess of enthusiasm in certain cultural moments for one or the other's position. "Dewey was reacting to American education as it was before science and technology had become part of the educated American's image of himself and of his country's future. Hutchins (and by extension, Adler) was reacting, thirty years later, against the astonishingly rapid success of people like Dewey and Veblen in making the intellectuals aware of science and technology..."

It should be noted, however, that Rorty's justification in general studies for both scientific method and the Great Books is thoroughly Deweyan in inspiration. Rorty's justification is what Leo Strauss and his recently notorious student, Allan Bloom would condemn as historicist; it regards truth as the daughter of time. It is that orientation in Rorty and Dewey that is anathema to Hutchins and Adler as much as to Strauss and Bloom.

Rorty acknowledges that Hutchins would be unlikely to approve his basis for the reconciliation with a kind of aside in which he critiques Hutchins' famous lines from The Higher Learning in America, "The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same."[4] Rorty labels this as "a relic of Platonism" and "neo-Thomist." "Truth is not everywhere the same," he argues, "because...human existence is essentially linguistic and essentially historical."

To my knowledge, neither Hutchins nor Adler has deliberately aligned his philosophical views with any specific religious tradition; nevertheless I don't think Rorty's reference to Hutchins' argument as "neo-Thomist" should be regarded as off-hand or casual. Earlier in his article Rorty refers to Nietzsche's view that the Platonic notion of "objective truth, is a survival of religious belief...an half-hearted and confused attempt to secularize and domesticate the notion of God." Rorty regards "both Plato's conception of Reason and his realistic conception of Objective Truth, truth as correspondence to reality, as forms of what Nietzsche called 'the longest lie' -- the lie that there is something beyond mankind to which it is man's duty to be faithful."

Rorty takes as his task to reconceive general education starting "from Nietzschean rather than Platonic assumptions. He regards "General Studies"

as the kind of education that aims at what Alfred North Whitehead calls "Romance" (the first of three educational stages he describes in The Aims of Education.)[5] He notes that one thing that unites Dewey with Adler and Hutchins is the fear that the over-emphasis on technical specialization in education will mean an end to educational romance in which "the student will never have heroes, will never fall in love with anything." Adler and Hutchins see this as resulting from situations in which the student has never been given a chance "to use his mind," or "to have his higher faculties awoken." To Dewey, in contrast, "it is the fear that he will never see himself as part of the human species, as part of the adventure of the race."

Rorty thinks that the literary and activity content of a core curriculum is best chosen by the faculty out of their own "loves," since that is the best way of insuring that teachers are those "whose sense of participation in the community—and thus whose sense of the point of their own lives—is somehow bound up with reading the books or performing the activities, which they have picked for the core. For only in that way will a sense of community and tradition be engendered in the students."

Rorty is guarded in his acknowledgement of the religious nature of general studies. Through Nietzsche, he is conscious of the religious origins of the Platonic tradition, but he says little about the religious orientation of the tradition that includes Nietzsche, Gadamer, and Dewey. Consider such phrases, cited above, however, as "the adventure of the human race," or his description of teachers within the latter tradition as those whose sense of participation in the community is bound up with "the sense of the point of their own lives." It seems to me that these remarks verge on ground that many would regard as religious. Rorty, it seems to me, has

missed an opportunity to point out the contrasting religious traditions of Dewey and Adler.

In contrast to Adler, Dewey was in religion, as in all else, ever the progressive. Only on the narrowest of positivistic interpretations, however, does progress for Dewey mean progress away from religion. Dewey called himself a humanist; and that is probably the word that best describes his religious orientation. That has led some critics to label Dewey a secular humanist. In the case of Dewey, however, such a label is clearly misleading.

The cultural separation between the sacred and secular is but one of the many dualisms against which Dewey warred. Dewey's proposed antidote to what Rorty calls "vulgar relativism"(and might, as aptly, be called "expedient pragmatism") is ethical pragmatism in which the values derived from the traditional experiences of the community continue to inform attempts to deal with the emergent problems of social life. Dewey's humanism is religious, not secular. When the arch-pluralist and fellow pragmatism, Horace Kallen, put forward the belief that "secularism is the will of God," Dewey clearly demurred.

If this is so, it raises the question of whether the religious humanism of Dewey is some sort of new creation, separate from the religious traditions of the Western world. I think not. Robert M. Crunden in his history of the progressive movement titled Ministers of Reform,[6] traces the roots of progressivism in America to that variant of Protestantism that became attracted to what is known as the Social Gospel. Dewey fits the pattern of a large number of such thinkers in Crunden's analysis.

During the early progressive era, writes Crunden, "America remained dominated by patterns of religious thought. Some were explicit, giving

rise to what became the social gospel movement. Most were implicit... Religion provided the central motivating force for adventurous thinking, but the subsequent secularization of modern culture has obscured the importance of religion in forming the minds of even the most secular thinkers."[7] Crunden provides evidence that, "Dewey began as religiously as any young progressive."[8] In a pattern not uncommon in those days, the evangelical New England Congregationalism that Dewey inherited from his family was transformed by the religious philosophy of Hegel. As Dewey wrote in a biographical essay, later in life, "Hegel's synthesis of subject and object, matter and spirit, the divine and the humane...operated as an immense release, a liberation."[9]

In agreement with Crunden, I think that we under-estimate Dewey if we ignore the religious currents in American culture of which he was a part. We should recall also that the Protestantism that resulted in the social gospel brought down an enormous religious reaction in American cultural life. In a sense, the work of Adler and Hutchins is a part of that reaction. The reaction that Adler represents is the belief that the deepest commitments of human lives should be based on reason and on faith in the possibility that reason enables humans to achieve enduring truths about their own nature and their place in the universe. This faith stands in stark contrast to the spiritual adventurism of Hegelian Protestantism, which sees in the very changeableness of human cultural history the coming into being of God's plan for humanity.

Adler is somewhat guarded in the expression of his own religious views. In his 1978 work, Aristotle for Everybody,[10] however, he has some interesting remarks tying Aristotle to what might be called the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

Adler's purpose in this brief and lucid volume is to convince the widest possible audience that "everyone should learn how to think philosophically," and that, "For that purpose there is no better teacher than Aristotle."[11] In order to make Aristotle a teacher of philosophy for today, however, Adler has to counter the historicism of thinkers such as Dewey. "Though Aristotle was a Greek who lived twenty-five centuries ago," writes Adler, "he was sufficiently acquainted with the main outlines of the world in which we live to talk about it as if he were alive today. As an aid to our being able to think philosophically, Aristotle would not be a better teacher even if he were acquainted with everything that modern scientists know."[12] What provides Aristotle's thought with enduring value, according to Adler, is that it begins in "common sense," i.e., in "notions that all of us possess... because they are the common stock of human thought about anything and everything" or, put another way, they are things that "are common to all of us, simply because we are human."[13] It is a function of his universal genius that Aristotle understood these things, "better than most of us do."[14]

Toward the end of his volume, however, Adler wishes to go beyond these ideas of Aristotle rooted in common sense, and to discuss some ideas—such as Infinity, Eternity, and Immateriality of Mind, and God—which Adler sees as elements of Aristotle's theology. Adler notes that, unlike the central core of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, Aristotle regarded God, <u>not</u> as a creator, but as a prime mover. Then Adler attempts to show that if we expand our notion of what it means to create, we may understand how Aristotle, while regarding the world as eternal, might nevertheless have assigned God a creative function. "In one sense of the word," Adler writes, "to create is to cause something that does not exist to come into existence. In another

sense of the word (a more subtle sense, perhaps), to create is to cause (in the Aristotelian sense of a final cause, or telos) the existence of that which may or may not exist, without regard to its coming into existence."[15] Adler concludes his book with the comment, "If his (Aristotle's) theology is not related to our common sense thought, as his philosophy is, it is at least related to common religious beliefs—religious beliefs that have prevailed in Western civilization for more than two thousand years." Thus has Adler reconciled the theology of his teacher with the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

It is my contention that Dewey's and Adler's views on education represent a clash of religious traditions. It is such clashes that are a source of despair for another contemporary philosophical follower of Aristotle, Alasdair MacIntyre. In a recent article entitled, "Traditions and Conflicts,"[16] MacIntyre regards contemporary American culture as chaotic, riven by a long-standing conflict in traditions. As examples he points to the Protestant tradition which began with Melancthon and Beza (among others) and includes Spenser, Milton, the philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment, Kierkegaard, Rembrandt, Van Gogh, Bach and Handel. MacIntyre says of this tradition, "its last great institutional achievement, before the twin degradations of those nineteenth century inventions, liberal theology and fundamentalism, was the dominant early nineteenth century college curriculum in the United States."

To this tradition MacIntyre contrasts what he calls a Catholic tradition of Aristotle, Virgil, Dante and Aquinas. "We have, therefore, at least two distinct and to some degree antagonistic Christian cultural traditions." writes MacIntyre; adding that by recognition of this "we shall perhaps be cured of any tendency to speak of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in culture any more than in theology. And those who, like Secreatary Bennett,

invite us to restore in the curriculum what they denominate the values of that spurious amalgam will have to face the fact that it is only a conflict of traditions to which we can be invited."

If Rorty distorts his picture of the conflict by his own historicism then MacIntyre's picture is distorted by his classicism. His dismissal of nineteenth century liberal Protestantism as a "degradation" rather than as an extension of a legitimate tradition is part of the reason that so many today are unaware of the religious roots of Deweyan progressivism.

MacIntyre's despair regarding academic life in America stems from his concern that "we have too many, too various, and too conflicting measures of importance, and their conjoint and tolerant application allows importance to far too much, and so destroys the possibility of rational choice." MacIntyre concludes that "Selection and exclusion are what the curriculum requires—as does life itself—and these are supplied by traditions, each with its own proper limiting intolerances."

Surely Adler's position is not far from MacIntyre's own. The Paideia Proposal clearly calls for selection and exclusion, based on a curricular tradition with its own limiting intolerances. Yet Adler has dedicated that proposal to the historicist, Dewey, representative of either a competing tradition, or, as MacIntyre might have it, of the degradation of tradition. G. Max Wingo writes of perennialists and progressivists that "both of these philosophical traditions that underlie the two bodies of educational theory are humanistic.... The issue over which they differ is a question, "What is Man?"[17]

It seems to me that the neo-Protestant humanism of Dewey differs from Adler's classical humanism as much on questions of God and truth as on the

nature of man. While both Dewey and Adler may appear "secular" in their approaches to intellectual life, in both cases their secularism is embedded in a religious tradition. The central issue between them is whether God's truth is eternal and accessible to humans of any age or place, or whether God's truth is to be found in the evolving workings of human cultural life.

The division has profound educational implications. If the truth, as Adler understands it, is to be found in texts that have achieved the status of classics of our cultural life then full membership in a democratic community requires some measure of mastery of that truth. While many of the young may succeed in mastering the core curriculum of the Paideia Proposal, adult demands that they do so can only be enforced by the threat of failure on the part of some to qualify for membership.

Deweyan progressivism, in contrast, begins with the assumption of universal membership on the part of all willing to participate in the activities of the school and the culture. If invidious distinctions arise in such a situation, it becomes the responsibility of each member of a democratic society to seek means to insure the continued participation of all its members on the basis of equality. The curriculum of such a school cannot be based on an established body of truth. According to Dewey it should be based rather on those activities by which members of a community learn to cooperate in addressing their common concerns, whether those concerns are intellectual, ethical, political, economic, religious, artistic, or recreational.

Should the Paideia Proposal have been dedicated to John Dewey? As always, the philosophical answer is, "Yes and No." It is evident that Dewey and Adler represent strongly contrasting philosophic and religious traditions,

and one may be misled by Adler's dedication were he or she unaware of these differences.

There is irony in the fact that Strauss and Bloom would be likely to reject the educational proposals of Dewey on the ground that Dewey's historicist view of truth is anathema to the preservation of democratic culture. Hutchins and Adler, in contrast, have both recognized that Dewey speaks forcefully to certain aspects of democratic cultural life. From the "Great Books" perspective of the latter, Dewey may, from a contemporary perspective, be said to have made an enduring intellectual contribution to our cultural traditions. For them, Dewey has, at least in a limited degree, joined the pantheon. To some this may appear to be an attempt to co-opt Dewey's reputation in the service of a tradition he himself rejected.

On the other hand, the dedication to Dewey may suggest a deeper sense in which Adler and Dewey share a commitment to democracy. In a recent article,[18] Rorty cites the work of John Rawls, who, in his A Theory of Justice, "takes religious toleration as paradigmatic for a democratic political outlook." "More recently," Rorty writes, "Rawls has suggested that democratic social theory should develop the same sort of tolerance for alternative philosophical doctrines." I believe that Rawls and Rorty are correct in their view that tolerance of religious and philosophical diversity is the defining characteristic of democracy, and I take Adler's dedication of the Paideia Proposal to Dewey as an indication that he, at some level of his thinking, recognized that principle as well.

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